

## Cardinal-Prime Ministers, ca. 1450 - ca. 1750: careers between personal choices and cultural life scripts

Rietbergen, Peter

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version  
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

**Zur Verfügung gestellt in Kooperation mit / provided in cooperation with:**  
GESIS - Leibniz-Institut für Sozialwissenschaften

### Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Rietbergen, P. (2014). Cardinal-Prime Ministers, ca. 1450 - ca. 1750: careers between personal choices and cultural life scripts. *Historical Social Research*, 39(1), 48-75. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.39.2014.1.48-75>

### Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY Lizenz (Namensnennung) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/deed.de>

### Terms of use:

This document is made available under a CC BY Licence (Attribution). For more Information see:  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

---

# Cardinal-Prime Ministers, ca. 1450 – ca. 1750: Careers between Personal Choices and Cultural Life Scripts

Peter Rietbergen \*

---

**Abstract:** »Kardinäle in der Funktion eines Premierministers, ca. 1450 – ca. 1750«. From the late 15th until the late 18th century, 15 Italian men shared a particular occupational life course, by becoming prime minister as well as cardinal to the Church of Rome. Some became prime minister after having been cardinal; others had a reversed career of becoming prime cardinal after having been prime minister. It is obvious that personal experiences will have influenced the policies they set out, especially when a prime minister had been a cardinal before. But, on the other hand, the impersonal cultural life script of being a cardinal or being a prime minister may have predominated personal inclinations.

**Keywords:** Cultural life script, cardinals, prime ministers.

---

## 1. Introduction

---

Altar and throne, priest and king. Ever since men, economically and socially bursting out of the confines of the hunter-gather family structures, started to build ever more complex organizations – tribes, and later village and urban communities, states et cetera – they have battled for power. Till well into the twentieth century, the battle was waged mostly between those whose position rested on their claim to be able to approach and even control the powers of nature and the cosmos, the “mysterium fascinans et tremendens”, as Rudolf Otto termed it in 1917 (Otto 1917), and those who built their position on ‘violence’, on the force of arms, as well as on the charisma that victory in battle procured, the phenomenon so well analyzed by Max Weber, even though victory sometimes was attributed to, or explained by divine support, which in itself was seen as a reward for moral probity. But always the two needed one another. Priests appropriated royal, secular power to aggrandize their position, kings enacted priestly, religious rituals to legitimize their rule. No wonder many cultures had their priest-kings: ‘the pope’ and the ‘dalai lama’ are the last in a millennial history.

---

\* Peter Rietbergen, Institute for Historical, Literary and Cultural Studies, Radboud University, Erasmusgebouw 10.16, Erasmusplein 1, 6525 HT Nijmegen, Netherlands; p.rietbergen@let.ru.nl.

In the states of what would eventually become Europe but for more than a thousand years had been “Christendom,” the world of the Church of Rome, the information monopoly necessary for the effective, lasting exercise of political-administrative power lay in the hands of the clergy. They were the men who read, who wrote, who knew and even made ‘the law’ – for Canon Law was the vector through which Roman Law penetrated Europe –, in short they were best set to control the ever more complicated processes wherein power was realized. The very fact that, as representatives of the Church, those amongst them who had entered the priesthood also wielded ‘spiritual violence’, viz. from the pulpit and in the confessional, even increased their authority and power. Consequently, rulers often chose religious men as their counselors and chief administrators, though – certainly from the 15th century onwards – the same rulers vied with the Church for control over their subjects. Indeed, quite often princes decided to entrust the general direction of their state to such religious men, who then became chancellor or ‘prime minister’.<sup>1</sup>

From the late 15th to the middle of the 18th century, the states of Roman Catholic Europe even had ‘cardinal-prime ministers’: as servants of the secular government, they steered the ship of state but also were given – or did their very best to acquire – the dignity of cardinal. It made them members of the ‘Holy (or Sacred) College’, and as such they became ‘princes of the Church’. They wore the ‘red hat’ and were addressed as ‘Your Eminency’. More importantly, they were the electors for one of the world’s most unique positions, that of pope.

Who were they, the fifteen men I have identified? What was their background? Had they opted for a career in the Church before being called to govern the state, or did they, having risen to the one-but-highest secular position in their country, yet desire to also reach the one-but-highest religious position in Christendom – and, with it, the chance to, perhaps, become “pontifex maximus,” Christ’s vicar on earth? How did they manage to combine religion and politics, in their life, and in their work? Or did they not?

These are, essentially, questions that relate to what we may term the “script” – in another, earlier culture, people would have said: the fate – that, within and conditioned by a specific cultural context, determines man’s life, in an as yet difficult to gauge interaction with what many like to describe as their free will, that allows them, or so they feel, to shape their own life.

To ensure comparability in my analysis of these fifteen men, I need a convincing chronological framework. From the late 15th century onwards, royal power stabilized both in England and in France, following the disruptive Hundred Years’ War. In Spain, the alliance (1469/1479) between the ruling houses of

---

<sup>1</sup> I do not count the men who were both cardinal and minister but not, either *de facto* or *de iure*, prime minister, i.e. such men as, e.g. in France the cardinals De Pierre de Bernis, De Tencin, et cetera.

Aragon and Castile resulted in peace and a measure of quiet that allowed the united dynasty to start enlarging its authority. From their home-base in Austria, the Habsburg family succeeded to permanently gain the – since then only ‘pro forma’ elective – dignity of Holy Roman Emperor. Moreover, with the marriage of Emperor Maximilian to the heiress of Burgundy, they began their rise to a position of almost pan-European power.

In the late 18th century, growing secularization and the inexorable separation between Church and State made a combination of the role of cardinal and prime minister ever less likely. Actually, since then no person ever has filled both positions at the same time.

**Table 1:** Individuals Named both Cardinal and Prime Minister, ca. 1450 – ca. 1750

Name	Dynasty	State	Year of Birth	Cardinalate	Year of Death
Armand-Jean du Plessis de Richelieu	Bourbon	France	1585	1622	1644
Giulio/Jules Mazarin(i)	Bourbon	France	1602	1641	1661
Guillaume Dubois	Bourbon	France	1656	1721	1723
André-Hercule de Fleury	Bourbon	France	1653	1726	1743
John Morton	Tudor	England	1420	1493	1500
Thomas Wolsey	Tudor	England	1471	1515	1530
Reginald Pole	Tudor	England	1500	1536	1558
Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros	Burgundy	Spain	1430	1507	1517
Adriaan Boeyens	Habsburg/Spain	Spain	1459	1517	1523
Giulio Alberoni	Bourbon/Spain	Spain	1664	1717	1752
Mercurino Arborio di Gattinara	Habsburg	Holy Roman Empire	1465	1529	1530
Melchior K(h)lesl	Habsburg	Holy Roman Empire	1552	1616	1630
Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle	Habsburg	The Netherlands	1517	1562	1586
Tamas Bakocz	Hungary		1442	1500	1521
David Beaton	Stuart	Scotland	1494	1536	1546

My group not only encompasses “the usual suspects”: the two famous seventeenth-century French cardinal-prime ministers Armand-Jean du Plessis de Richelieu (Ripert 2002; Hildesheimer 2004; Sturdy 2004), who was born French, and the originally Italian Giulio Mazzarini or Jules Mazarin (Goubert 1998; Dulong 1999; Bertière 2007), as well as their two less famous eighteenth-century successors Guillaume Dubois (Lagane 2000) and André-Hercule de Fleury (Chaussinand-Nogaret 2002; Mercadier 2002), both French as well.

Chronologically, my list starts with the Spaniard Francisco Ximenes de Cisneros (Rummel 1999; Garcia Oro 2005), the only one who, as far as I know also is the protagonist in a theater play (De Montherlant 1960).<sup>2</sup> It ends with the Italian Giulio Alberoni (Castagnoli 1929; Harcourt-Smith 1944). Both served Spain, as did the Dutchman Adriaan Boeyens (Cools 2012) – he the only one to become pope!

The Italian Mercurino Arborio, who mostly was named after his native town of Gattinara, is the only one who has left a “life narrative” (Marullo 2001); he was employed by the Habsburgs in Northern Europe, as was Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle who, while from the imperial free town Besançon, worked mainly in The Netherlands (Van Durme 1953; Jonnekin 1989). Melchior Khlesl, born and bred in Vienna, ruled the Habsburg-Austrian states, albeit for a few years only (von Hammer-Purgstall 1847-1851; Kerschbaumer 1905).

Others on my list are the Hungarian Tamas Bakocz,<sup>3</sup> as well as the Scotsman David Beaton (Sanderson 1986), and three Englishmen, viz. John Morton (Harper-Bill 2004), Thomas Wolsey (Gwyn 1990) and Reginald Pole (Mayer 2000). In short, fifteen cardinal-prime ministers, presented below not chronologically but in relation to the dynasties and states they served.

A few remarks are in order.

It will be obvious that I have decided to exclude the Papal States or “Patrimonium Petri,” i.e. the Central-Italian territories ruled by the pope-king, the reason being that every single high political position there was automatically held by a person who had at least entered religion, and, mostly, also was an ordained priest.

The four Frenchmen do not only hold center stage numerically. Indeed, Philippe de Champaigne’s portrait of Richelieu is the portrait par excellence of a ‘Prince of the Church’. Moreover, three of them also figure prominently in the widely-read novels of Alexandre Dumas, Jr., to start with, again, Richelieu in *Les Trois Mousquetaires* (Paris 1844).<sup>4</sup> Also, both he – no less than 93 times! – and Mazarin have become film heroes or rather villains, just as the Englishmen Wolsey and Pole, viz. most recently in the BBC TV series *The Tudors*.

Alas, I cannot answer the question why the Bourbons in France employed no less than four cardinal-prime ministers, the Tudors in England and the successive dynasties in Spain three, the Habsburgs in Austria two and the other states only one. Precisely in Spain, perhaps the most ‘religious’ state in early-

---

<sup>2</sup> Marie von Ebner-Eschenbach’s tragedy “Richelieu” only exists in fragments. I do not count E. Bulwer-Lytton’s *Richelieu, or The Conspiracy* (London 1839), which is an adventure story rather than a character portrait.

<sup>3</sup> All entries in encyclopediae and wikipedia are based on Fraknoi (1889).

<sup>4</sup> Mazarin figures prominently in the sequels: A. Dumas, *Vingt Ans après* en *Le Vicomte de Bragelonne*, en Dubois in *Une Fille du Régent*.

modern Europe, from the middle of the 16th century onwards the kings relied on a series of very worldly “validos”, favourites (Tomas y Valiente 1963; Elliott and Brockliss 1999), who do not seem to have coveted the cardinalate. Yet, in this context one of them presents a peculiar case: Francesco Gomez de Sandoval y Rojas, first duke of Lerma (1553-1625). He was the “valido” of Philip III (Feros-Carrasco 2002; Williams 2006). In early spring 1618 it became clear to him that he might well be the victim of court intrigues, partly instigated by his own son, that would procure his downfall. Afraid of the ultimate form punishment could take, he prevailed upon Pope Paul III to nominate him cardinal, in March, which ensured at least his physical survival. Although Lerma was exiled from court in Autumn that year, he had avoided the worst. In Madrid a doggerel began circulating: “Para no morir ahorcado, el mayor ladrón de España se viste de colorado” – ‘to escape the gallows Spain’s biggest thief changed his colours’. A year after he had received the red hat, Lerma, who had been widowed in the mean time, took holy orders and said mass for the first time... Lerma’s life inspired the English playwright Robert Howard – who knew about the phenomenon of royal favourites, since it existed in early seventeenth-century England as well – to a very successful tragedy: *The Great Favourite* (London 1668).

---

## 2. A Career in the Church – An Alternative “Life Script”?

---

Since early times, the Church provided young men from lowly families with the for many only opportunity to escape their normal “life script”, i.e. the material and spiritual poverty and drudgery that would have been their lot, certainly in Europe’s largely agrarian world. Sometimes they made a respectable career for themselves in the world of religion and a few, whether through merit, good luck, or both, even reached high status and power.

At the same time, the Church offered an escape to the younger sons of noble families. Since in most European countries, primogeniture was the rule, they faced a situation wherein they would not inherit the family’s title(s) and possessions, in short a position of power and wealth ‘in the world’ – although precisely their background and, indeed, their entire upbringing somehow had geared them for such a privileged “life script”. A career in the higher echelons of the Church, with the riches and power often attached to it – what with the income one might cull from wealthy abbeys, bishoprics and other lucrative benefices – was not to be despised. Indeed, to effectuate this alternative “script” became a form of family politics that, in noble circles, was even more assiduously planned and pursued than in more humble families. The ubiquitous phenomenon of the ‘family bishopric’ was the most visible manifestation.

Obviously, in most if not all ‘early modern’ “life scripts,” what we term personal choice often or, indeed, nearly almost was absent. It is a concept that, at

least in Europe, only became the norm from the late eighteenth century onwards, when Romanticism introduced the notion of individuality; in earlier times, precisely families – one’s parents but, also, more distant but influential ‘heads of family’ – dictated the future of their offspring. But whatever their background, those who entered the Church were supposed to follow a “life script” that differed from the one laid out for most of their fellow-men if only because precisely that basic ‘necessity’, procreation was formally forbidden them.

---

### 3. Social Background

---

What families did these fifteen men come from? Only two were born in what probably were rather penurious circumstances. Alberoni’s father earned a living as “giardinere” – but was he a worker in another man’s orchard, or an independent market gardener? However this may be, young Alberoni was orphaned at an early age and had to earn his keep as an agricultural labourer. Bakocz was the son of a wagoner.<sup>5</sup>

Boeyens, Dubois, Khlesl, Mazarin en Wolsey hailed from the urban bourgeoisie – which did not necessarily imply great(-er) prosperity: Boeyens Sr. was a naval carpenter, Khlesl Sr. a baker. Probably because of their unusual career, some of the fifteen fell victim to politically motivated gossip and, even slander, precisely in connection with their social background. Wolsey was dismissed as a butcher’s son, though his father probably was a well-to-do cloth merchant. Mazarin, whose parent was the estate manager of a noble family, suffered from his ‘modest’ origins his entire life; as prime minister, he had a team of scholars invent a genealogy that suggested a far more impressive ancestry. And though Dubois Sr. was a medical doctor with, indeed, a university degree, the cardinal’s enemies depicted him as a lowly apothecary and quack. One thing is clear, though: precisely given their humble, i.e. non-noble background, these men could not endanger the position of the ruling dynasty.

What about Morton, Beaton, Gattinara, Granvelle, and Fleury? They were born in the lower nobility, sometimes even in families only very recently ennobled, in short in a class that did not automatically guarantee wealth, either. Being “hidalgos,” Cisneros’s parents – described as poor – belonged to the same group, as did Richelieu’s father. At first sight, Beaton and Granvelle seem exceptions, but they actually prove the rule. Beaton’s family was influential: his uncle held Scotland’s most important see, the archbishopric of St. Andrews, and was the realm’s lord privy seal. Granvelle’s father, Nicholas

---

<sup>5</sup> Some authors write that Bakocz’ (elder) brother already had been ennobled, but if so, this surely was because of Tamas’s influence.

Perrenot, had been one of the confidants of Emperor Charles V. But precisely because both men did not belong to the ancient nobility, ‘of the sword’, but to the “noblesse de robe”, no one suspected them of dynastic aspirations. In short: had these seven stemmed from families with a history of wealth and power, they probably would not have stood a chance to become prime minister: most rulers would have perceived them as a threat, especially if they were related to the grand houses of the realm who, more often than not, vied for power with the ruling dynasty and thus endangered political stability.

The case of Pole was different. Amongst the fifteen, he was the only one born into the highest nobility; indeed, through his mother his claims on the English throne were more legitimate than the ones of Henry VIII, from the Tudor family. No wonder the king always feared him and tried to keep him from positions of power as much as possible. Pole’s star only rose when he indicated he would definitely not use his birthright against Henry’s successors, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth I.

Summarizing, of the fifteen men two were definitely base-born, while five belonged to the urban middle class and eight to the nobility.

As a necessary aside, I need to explain why ‘royal cardinals’, of whom there were a good many, never became prime ministers. From the late 15th to the late 18th century, dozens of European princes – younger sons – from such ruling families as the Este, Gonzaga and Medici, but also Trastámara, Habsburg and Bourbon, were elevated to the cardinalate, nominated for that position by their ruling brothers or uncles for reasons of (family and national) status, and of national influence in the Europe-wide assembly that would elect the pope. However, precisely because of their close proximity to the ruler and his immediate successor, they definitely were not supposed to gain even greater power by being appointed to positions of real influence. Prince-cardinal Albrecht of Habsburg (1559/1577/1621) is an interesting borderline case. He received the lower orders at an early age, because his uncle, King Philip II of Spain, wanted him to eventually succeed to Spain’s most important and wealthy see, the archbishopric of Toledo. In 1577, Albrecht was given the red hat. In 1583, Philip sent him to Portugal, to be his viceroy in the kingdom he had just conquered. Sometime later, the king even decided that he would turn over the sovereignty of the seventeen Netherlands to his nephew. But since Philip also wished his daughter, Isabella, to marry her uncle, Albrecht per force had to renounce his religious dignity (Duerloo 2012).

---

#### 4. Serving the Church or Serving the State?

---

My first question is at what age these fifteen men took the lower ordinations? Did they already serve the State before starting a career in the Church? And did accepting a religious position necessarily imply that they also began to live a



religious life, which, amongst other things, meant a celibate existence? To first settle this issue, it should be clear that although, of course, a formal marriage was no longer possible, one yet could reach the cardinalate while still a deacon. As the Lerma-case shows, it was not necessary to be ordained priest to achieve the one-but-highest position in the Church. However, a man who wanted to become a cardinal-priest or a cardinal-bishop – the two other degrees of the cardinalate – had to receive the higher ordinations. Indeed, this meant that a cardinal-deacon who was elected to the papacy, and thus became supreme pastor of the Roman Catholic community, had to be ordained priest before he could be crowned with the tiara.

As to their first career, thirteen of the fifteen men did enter the clergy at a relatively young age, but their choices beyond that varied.

Francisco Ximenez not only entered the priesthood when he was young, he also was the only one who, at age 45, became a member of the regular clergy, a Franciscan monk: he spent some seven years in a monastery before taking up administrative tasks in the Order. Long after his fiftieth birthday, he became confessor to Isabella of Castile and archbishop of Toledo. Only then, his political career really took off. It lasted till his death at the extremely high age of 81.

Young Bakocz was adopted by an uncle, a priest, who educated him for the priesthood as well. Exactly when Tamas was ordained is not known, but it must have been before 1480. He became a bishop in 1487. At that time, he had already been serving the Hungarian king Mathias Corvinus as one of his secretaries for seven years. When Corvinus was succeeded by a relatively powerless Polish monarch, Bakocz became chancellor of the realm, in 1490, and prime minister. When he died, in 1521, he had been wearing the red hat for two decades.

John Morton, too, became a priest as a young man, but did not practice the ministry. After having served the Church in a few administrative functions, he turned royal servant. Only then, in 1478, he also was made bishop of Ely – probably because, as member of the king's Privy Council, he needed the status. In 1486, the founder of the Tudor dynasty, Henry VII, nominated him for the archbishopric of Canterbury and a year later appointed him lord chancellor; in that function he was in charge of the government of England. In 1493, Morton became a cardinal.

Thomas Wolsey started his career in the priesthood as well. Following his theological studies, in 1498 he was ordained. Nevertheless, he mainly took administrative positions. After a decade, he began serving Henry VII, who charged him with affairs of state. Two years later, his star really started rising. For when young Henry VIII ascended the throne and, at least initially, showed little inclination to interest himself in the minutiae of government, Wolsey turned out to be the ideal administrator. In 1514 he was consecrated bishop, and, a year later, elevated to the cardinalate.

Coming from Utrecht, Adriaan Boeyens went to Louvain in 1478 to study philosophy and theology. In 1489 he was ordained priest and became professor

of moral theology at his alma mater. He was an erudite, perhaps even a scholar, who enjoyed some fame – Erasmus was amongst his students. He also was well known for his principled attitudes, for example regarding upholding celibacy. In 1507, he was appointed instructor of young Prince Charles. In 1515, the heir to the throne asked him to travel to Spain, to ensure that the last will and testament left by his grandfather Ferdinand of Aragon was upheld and, indeed, changed in his favour. For his success in the negotiations, Adrian was rewarded with the see of Tortosa in 1516, and with the cardinalate in 1517. More importantly, he became the partner of Cardinal Cisneros in the government of the Spanish kingdoms, and after the old cardinal's death continued to try to rule those unruly regions till he was elected to the papacy in 1520.

Reginald Pole studied theology in Oxford and Padua, but did not take holy orders. Whether he opposed the divorce of Henry VIII or, in a more general sense, the religious policy followed by the king and by his cardinal-prime minister Wolsey is not clear, but in 1532 he felt forced to flee his country. He soon became involved in (Church) politics on the continent. However, the pope sensed an opportunity and made Pole cardinal-dean and, even, his special legate for England, hoping that the high-born prelate would become the symbol of the growing Catholic opposition against the royal reformation. While Pole could not re-enter England, his aged mother who had remained there was executed for high treason. For more than twenty years, Pole served the Church in various political-diplomatic capacities, most obviously as papal envoy to the council that had been convened at Trent. Only in 1554 did he finally return to England, where Henry's Catholic daughter now reigned. Soon, Queen Mary made him her prime minister. He did oppose the rather harsh suppression of heretics she advocated but, as was his wont in complex political-religious affairs, only half-heartedly so.

Antoine Perrenot received the lower orders as well, albeit obviously only to be able to possess a number of lucrative benefices. Actually, he almost immediately entered state service, as one of the secretaries of Charles V. In 1540 he was ordained, to be able to take the see of Atrecht/Arras, though the rules of Canon Law stipulated he was too young to do so. It is unclear whether he actually practiced the ministry. From the 1550s onwards, Granvelle was the most important man in the government of the non-Spanish states of Philip II.

Melchior Khlesl first became a servant of the Church: he took lower orders in 1577, and was ordained priest in 1579. He rose through the ranks and from 1588 governed the diocese of Wiener Neustadt. He then was charged with the catholic reform of all Austria. In the early years of the 17th century he sat on the imperial Privy Council, and was named prime minister in 1612.

Young Armand-Jean du Plessis de Richelieu was forced by his father to enter the military, since his elder brother was destined for the priesthood; he had to govern the bishopric of Luçon that had been granted to the family by Henry III and whose income stood between the Du Plessis's continued prosperity and

the threat of genteel poverty. However, the older son refused this script, and consequently Armand had to take holy orders, in 1605. As bishop, he fervently worked for the implementation of the Tridentine decrees. A few years later, his career took a political turn. But when he temporarily fell from royal favour, he yet showed his religious inclinations, writing an *Instruction du Chrétien* – which, by the way, was not the only theological text from his hand.

Guillaume Dubois went to school with the Jesuits and received the tonsure when he was thirteen years old. However, he obviously felt greater rewards could be reaped in state service. Both his undoubted cleverness and a good measure of intrigue and flattery resulted in a successful career, also materially speaking: he became a titular “abbé”, i.e. a man who only took the income from his abbey. Indeed, he accumulated no less than seven such incomes, without ever having to set foot in any of the monasteries that generated them.

His parents destined Hercule de Fleury for an ecclesiastical career – almost inevitably for a younger son in a gentry family that had to support eleven children. In 1666, Fleury became canon, in 1679 priest, in 1698 bishop. Only in 1726, 73 years old, did he accept a position in the French government, and soon was appointed prime minister; he retained this office till he died, aged 90.

Two men stand out in my list. Mercurino Gattinara married young, worked for a law degree in Turin, and then entered the service of Margaretha, daughter of Emperor Maximilian and dowager-duchess of Savoy. Her nephew Charles, king of Spain and lord of the seventeen Netherlands’ principalities, invited Gattinara – by then an acclaimed legal scholar – into his household in 1518, and appointed him grand chancellor in 1519. Many years later, when Gattinara’s wife had died – and he himself only had ten more months to live – Gattinara was given the red hat, and did take the lower orders, though he did not enter the priesthood.

The Italian Giulio Mazzarini studied law in Spain, and even received the doctorate. Aged 17, he took service with the pope, as a military officer and a diplomat. In that capacity, he attracted the attention of Richelieu, who persuaded him to come and work for France. He also won the affection of Queen-regent Anne, whose lover he became, according to widespread gossip; rumour also had it he fathered the boy who later became Louis XIV, but recently DNA-tests have laid to rest that tale. Mazarin only seems to have received holy orders in 1640, precisely to also be able to accept the cardinalate that was his reward for concluding an alliance between France and the dukes of Savoy, to counterbalance the influence of the Spanish-imperial party in Europe.

In short, as far as can be ascertained, five of the thirteen men who had started a career in the Church before going over to the State actually also had been priests and servants of the Church before they became prime minister: Ximenez, Boeyens, Khlesl, Richelieu and Fleury. The other ones almost immediately became state officials. If they went on to be ordained priest, it was in order to be

nominated for a bishopric, which they wanted in order to enjoy the prestige and wealth of their see; mostly, they left the actual administration to a substitute.

Despite having received the lower or, indeed, higher orders, some of these men definitely did not live the “life script” of an ideal priest – although we should realize that the norms which circumscribed this ideal mostly were formulated during the 19th century and, in retrospect, also were introduced in that century’s descriptions of the past.

When Beaton became a priest in 1537, in order to succeed his uncle as archbishop, he was already married and had begotten no less than eight children. As far as I have been able to make out, he continued his married life, according to a custom that had been traditional in the British Isles, though precisely in these decades it was strongly criticized by the advocates of the Catholic Reformation. Wolsey, who also was ordained at an early age, lived a comparable relation till he was consecrated bishop; he had at least two children. Cardinal Granvelle fathered three, though I do not know whether they were born before or after his ordination.

For many decades, Dubois worked in the higher reaches of French government, protected by the man who, from 1715 onwards, was regent of the realm, the sex-addicted Philip of Orleans, as whose procurer the abbé acted, according to rumours. Dubois himself had at least one mistress, whom, also according to gossip, he later even married. From 1718 onwards, he himself conducted French politics, hated and despised by such noble writers as the haughty dukes of Richelieu and St Simon, who, perhaps, we should not trust overmuch, since they obviously did all they could to vilify the man whom they considered a parvenu who should never have gained this position.

---

## 5. Prime Minister and Cardinal – Cardinal and Prime Minister

---

What came first in the professional lives of these men: the dignity and function of a ‘Prince of the Church’, or that of ‘prime minister’? The answer is simple: whatever their previous career in the service of the “*Ecclesia Romana*”, in most cases the red hat only came when, for a shorter or longer period, they had been involved in state government already.

It is far more complicated to determine on whose initiative these men, so powerful already, were raised to the cardinalate – and what were the reasons behind it? Was it their personal ambition, achieved with the support of the princes they served? Indubitably so, in a number of cases. Did the monarchs themselves press the pope to give their prime minister the red hat, to reward him, as well as to raise his status, and the status of the state he served? Quite obviously, that, too, often was the case. Or were these decisions part of papal policy? Definitely so. The Curia very well realized that it was losing power all

over Europe, due to the various reformations undertaken, sometimes, precisely with the support of state governments. Indeed, the popes knew that in most Catholic states the rulers used this situation to force Rome to relinquish power over the local Churches to the secular government. Knowing that whether or not a prime minister harboured any cardinal ambition himself, his masters wanted to have him given the red hat, Rome used the situation to create a possibly profitable *quid pro quo*.

In some cases we know the circumstances, although, of course, the sources often are prejudiced by all kinds of “*topoi*”. This, for example, holds for Gattinara. In his memoirs, written in the third person, he tells his readers that first Pope Clement VII and then Pope Leo X tried to convince him that in his political decision-making he had to consider papal concerns about developments between the states of the Italian peninsula and elsewhere in Europe. Yet he refused all offers of lucrative benefices and, indeed, the cardinalate, for he did not want to enter the clergy: “non essendo un ecclesiastico e non avendo intenzione di diventarlo, gli sembrava vano il tentativo di sedurlo con il cardinalato” (Borante 1915, 231). That is, till Charles yet ‘persuaded’ him to accept...

As archbishop of Toledo – primate of all Spain – first Ximenez and then Boeyens almost automatically received the red hat: using his prerogative to nominate his candidates for this see, the king could expect the pope to give such men the cardinal dignity. Bakocz, besides being prime minister, also was archbishop of Esztergom/Gran, which meant primate of Hungary; therefore, he too could count on being made a cardinal, a position he greatly desired but yet only got when he actually had reached the apex of his political power. Had Wolsey been archbishop of Canterbury, he too would automatically have been given the red hat. But he only governed the second archbishopric of England, York. When he was made cardinal, in 1515, this seems to have been more to strengthen his position as England’s chancellor: in that function he also had to try and rule an unruly clergy. Beaton, on the other hand, had been a cardinal since 1536, partly because he had been supported by France, Scotland’s traditionally against England, and partly because Pope Paul III, who was building a European-Catholic alliance against the by now schismatic Henry VIII, badly needed Scottish support. Only later, when Beaton also had become archbishop of St Andrews and, hence, primate of Scotland, did he actually become the head of government. Comparably, in England Pole’s power as cardinal-prime minister definitely increased when Mary, after he had been ordained, was able to put him in the see of Canterbury.

Granvelle reached the pinnacle of power when the pope made him archbishop and cardinal, which tallied with the general reorganization of the government of the seventeen Netherlands and the foundation of a new archbishopric, that of Mechelen/Malines, which Granvelle himself had helped create as the king’s chief counselor. Khlesl, though already a priest for many years, only became bishop and cardinal in 1615, after he had been made prime minister.

However, in 1618 he fell from favour with several powerful members of the Habsburg family. After some time in prison, for the rest of his life he again served the Church, ultimately as archbishop of Vienna.

In 1622, Richelieu was given the archbishopric of Lyon as well as the red hat to reward him for his mediation in the conflict between the dowager-Queen Maria and her son Louis XIII, who, however, did not really trust the new prelate. Only in the subsequent years did Richelieu succeed in taking the reins of French politics. In 1641, Mazarin's diplomatic successes for his adopted country caused Richelieu to nominate him for the cardinalate. But he never entered the priesthood. Yet, when the prime minister died in 1642, his protégé followed him, with, of course, the support of the Queen-regent Anne.

Though the Abbé Dubois had no real ties with the Church besides financial ones, he yet passionately strove for the highest ecclesiastical dignities. Even before he became prime minister, he constantly harassed the prince-regent with requests to be given an (arch-)bishopric. To that end, he also used the pretender to the British throne, James III Stuart, who lived his exile in Rome. Moreover, he sought the support of the all-powerful nephew of Pope Clement XI, the cardinal-collector Alessandro Albani, promising him huge sums of money as well as the art treasures he coveted. Finally, in 1720, when Dubois was already leading the French government, his wishes came true. First, he was given the archbishopric of Kamerijk/Cambrai. Even the Parisian populace was shocked, given the man's more than sullied reputation. But whatever public opinion said about him, Dubois knew he had to accept the priesthood. Yet he never visited his see which, incidentally, also gave him the title of "Prince of the Holy Roman Empire". After another year, his second wish was fulfilled, too: he was raised to the cardinalate.

Fleury already had been bishop for decades when, in Spring 1726, he became prime minister of France. He also became a cardinal, due to the wish of King Louis XV, who wanted to ensure that his most trusted adviser was treated as the highest-ranking non-royal person in the realm.

In short, only three or four of the fifteen – Pole, Beaton, Richelieu and, perhaps, Boeysens – had been wearing the red hat before they became prime minister, although even they already had been serving the state at that moment.

---

## 6. Politics

---

Is it possible to characterize the ideas of these men about the politics of their day, and their own role in it? Only a few of the fifteen were really outspoken about their political stance. Gattinara, for example, always wanted to uphold and even enlarge the power of his emperor and would condemn papal involvement in European politics if he felt forced to do so. He argued that God had meant the emperor, rather than the pope, to save Christendom:

The Lord most high, who is almighty, seemed to have put the fate of peace and war in the hands of Charles [...] in order that he might oversee the growth [...] of the Christian faith, and give the believers serenity and peace [...] Thus, the inheritance of Peter [...] would become more solid, and those who had left the flock would be returned to their shepherd, in the bosom of the Holy Church (Borante 1915, 231; Kodek 2004; my translation).<sup>6</sup>

He even wrote that the fate of the empire was, in some miraculous way, guided by God's own hand. Actually, he seems to have adhered to a rather 'medieval' form of caesaro-papism (Boone, 2011). Though less outspoken, Pole seems to have taken the exact opposite position, even after he returned to England to serve Mary. Of Ximenez it has been said that he created 'modern' Spain, i.e. the state of the Catholic Kings (Merton 1934). Though Boeyens succeeded him, he cannot be credited with such feats. Of course, Wolsey is famous – or infamous – because he enraged his sensuous and murderous master for not enabling him to divorce his lawful wife. Richelieu rightly is remembered because he succeeded in bringing a previously enfeebled France back to the center of the European stage (Levie 2001; Blanchard 2011), and Mazarin recently has been somewhat rehabilitated by historians for trying to keep peace in an increasingly chaotic Europe (Dethan 1981; Croxton 1999). In short, everyone agrees that these two grand Frenchmen have been, first and foremost, servants of the state, who tried to safeguard and even aggrandize France's role in the European 'concert' (Maelettke 2000; Hildesheimer 2007; d'Albis 2012). In the next century, Dubois, too, had a concept of the future of France's position now that the balance of power in Europe was changing (Chaussinand-Nogaret 2001).

Yet, all in all, from the late 15th to the middle of the 18th century the circumstances that conditioned the actions of these men have been too different to bring all of them together in one explanatory story. Therefore, I concentrate on the question whether they all did serve the interest of their state, first, or, at the same time, those of their Church – or at least of their faith? For the answer will go some way to help us determine what was the significance these men attached to the two scripts that came with their functions – the religious one, and the secular – and the power these scripts had over them, over their lives. In short, to know what their real priorities were, I first have to weigh the actions of these cardinal-prime ministers.

Though he governed the kingdom, Ximenez may yet have also considered the religious situation of his state. As Grand Inquisitor he reformed religious life both in Spain and in the newly-acquired colonies. There, he supported the

---

<sup>6</sup> Italian original: "L'Altissimo, che tutto può, sembrava aver posto le sorti della pace e della guerra nelle mani di Carlo. Non perché abusasse del favore e della grazia divina, ma perché, caduto ogni pretesto, potesse mirare alla crescita e alla elevazione della religione cristiana, concedere ai credenti serenità e pace [...] In questo modo, l'eredità di Pietro, fondata sulla pietra, sarebbe potuta diventare più salda e le pecore erranti venir ricondotte all'ovile del loro pastore, nel seno e nel gregge della santa chiesa."

missionaries against the conquistadores, at least partly because he feared that this rabble, far removed from the royal eye, would decide they could well oppose the government in Madrid. Nevertheless even this policy obviously strengthened the ideological cohesion of the Spanish states and, consequently, the effectiveness of royal power. The same holds, albeit perhaps to a lesser extent, for the policies pursued by Boeyens. Besides being a diplomat and prime minister, as Grand Inquisitor – he succeeded Ximenes in that capacity as well – he too tried to reinforce the religious unity of Charles's states, which, obviously, also profited secular power.

Morton definitely was a servant of the state first and foremost. Perhaps significantly, the only book he ever wrote is a history of Richard III, with whom, on Bosworth Field, the royal hopes of the House of York were lost. Even after the king's death, Morton tried to discredit him, thus to increase the legitimacy of Henry Tudor, the man who had won the battle, though his rights to the throne were tenuous, to say the least, the man who as King Henry VII had raised him to power. As prime minister, Morton centralized the king's high jurisdiction as well as the royal finances. Though Morton reformed the English monasteries, he probably also did so to increase the taxes they paid to the treasury, while at the same time curbing their independence vis à vis the secular clergy, the bishops and archbishops of the realm.

How to interpret the life and works of Bakocz? Few doubted his personal piety, but yet even when he started reforming the Hungarian Church his main aim seems to have been to reinforce royal power and strengthen the kingdom's international position. Also, when he felt he needed to do so, he openly opposed papal policy, as, e.g., in creating the League of Cambrai in 1508. Admittedly, in 1513 Bakocz was persuaded to take the lead in a crusade preached by Pope Leo X, but it seems he was not driven by religious motives: rather, he wanted to enhance Hungary's role in the Balkans (Sékely 1980; Housely 1998).

In France, the two seventeenth-century cardinal-prime ministers first and foremost sought to consolidate and enlarge the power of the Crown, even though this meant they repeatedly had to counter Rome's efforts to make the French Church more amenable to the Curia's wishes. Also, to reach a new balance of power in Europe which would enable France to achieve the position they felt it deserved, both Richelieu and Mazarin were willing to make concessions that, e.g., caused the liberties of the Roman Catholic populations of the German states and the Northern Netherlands to be severely curtailed.

In the 18th century, Dubois did not shield the French Church from the encroachments of royal government. Significantly, his portrait by the court painter Rigaud shows him in his cardinal robes, but he holds a letter he is writing to the king. Of the four books that adorn his desk, three are about politics and government; only the fourth is the *Pentateuch*. An interesting case in point is, however, the much-discussed introduction of the papal bull *Unigenitus* (1713), which the Curia wanted to be proclaimed a basic law of France. Dubois now



held with Rome – primarily to be given the red hat. His successor Fleury confirmed the bull should be upheld. It meant that, on the one hand, he diminished the freedom traditionally enjoyed by the ‘Gallican Church’ through its support of royal authority. However, he actually used the situation to undermine the position of the Parliament of Paris, that sought to suppress the bull; he did so precisely because both he and King Louis XV felt that the Parisian politicians were a far graver threat to royal absolutism than, in this case, the Roman demands. Moreover, precisely because the majority of France’s lower clergy did not want the bull, Fleury and the bishops sought to outwit them: they were afraid of the chaos that might ensue from religious debate, since it would destabilize French society and, hence, the position both of state government and of the higher echelons of the Church.<sup>7</sup>

Khlesl, who first showed himself a diehard Counter-Reformer, soon turned into a politician who rather stressed law and reason as the governing principles of the Habsburg states, also using them to steer an (imperial) course in the hugely complicated religious-political issues that threatened the cohesion of the Holy Roman Empire (Rainer 1964). Seemingly, the only one of the fifteen really interested in matters of theology and Canon Law was Pole, who wrote a number of very interesting and, also, politically-laden texts on such issues. He obviously hoped to thus steer the Church into liberal and, perhaps therefore, hopefully favourable waters during the decades wherein the various reformations threatened Rome’s position (Fenlon 2008).

As far as I know, only one of the cardinal-prime minister ever articulated the complexity of his double function. Wolsey, though he understood the fundamental role of the Church in the tissue of English society, was a royal administrator first and foremost, who always sought to increase his master’s power – or, perhaps better said, that of the Crown. But in 1529, his days were numbered. Fallen out of favor with Henry, falsely accused of high treason by his enemies, he died on his way to the dreaded Tower. Only in those days did he, albeit implicitly, voice the dilemma that other cardinal-prime ministers may have felt as well: “If I had served my God as diligently as I did my king, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs” (Holinshed 1577, 1552).<sup>8</sup> Mazarin on the other hand never seems to have experienced any qualms. However, it has been said that in 1661, on his dying bed, he admonished young Louis XIV to never appoint a prime minister again. The advice did not fall on deaf ears. Soon, the king took in the reins of power, and for the subsequent fifty or more years reigned “par lui-même”.

---

<sup>7</sup> I do not follow Shennan (1966).

<sup>8</sup> The quote has been used by Shakespeare, in: *Henry VIII*, third act, second scene.

---

## 7. Candidates for the Papacy?

---

Collectively, the cardinals constituted the Sacred College. The number of members was variable till, in 1586, Pope Sixtus V fixed it at seventy. Depending on two largely fortuitous factors, viz. the length of their own life as cardinal and the number of pontiffs who died during it, a Prince of the Church could expect to be called to Rome one or more times to elect a new pope and, if the Holy Spirit so moved his colleagues, himself be elected to become Christ's Vicar on Earth.

Conclaves took place in a politically highly-charged context. Each Roman Catholic monarch wanted one or more of his loyal subjects in the electorate, if only because of the status that came with the red hat, for the person himself and for the state he represented. Equally important was that thus he would be able to influence the election, or even might expect his own candidate to eventually occupy the chair of St. Peter. However, besides lobbies that acted along the lines of national interests, there also were factions who chose their candidates for religious-ideological reasons. In short, whoever had set his eyes on the papacy had to steer a clever course and determine the precise moment to move those he felt to be his backers in order to get the majority of the votes.

The question is, of course, who of the fifteen cardinals who also were prime ministers cardinals, saw the death of one or more popes and consequently could try to decide on the future policy of the Church, and, in a sense, the destiny of Europe. More importantly, were any of them ever a real candidate for the succession? While the answer to the first question is rather easy to give, the second requires a bit of partly inspired guesswork (Pastor 1906; Baumgartner 2003). Four of the fifteen simply never lived to see a "sede vacante": Morton, Beaton, Gattinara en Dubois. Ximenez, Boeyens and Richelieu were called upon to elect a pope only once. Wolsey, Granvelle, Khlesl, Mazarin and Fleury were among the electors twice, Bakocz and Pole thrice. Only Alberoni, whose cardinalate of 35 years was the longest of the group, was four times able to co-determine who would be the next pope.

Obviously, it is interesting to know whether the gentlemen actually undertook the long and, indeed, arduous journey to Rome, there to be 'imprisoned' in the Sistine Chapel, sometimes for months, and await the arrival of the Holy Spirit? And whom did they choose? Both questions are not easy to answer. My research shows, that some would have been hard set to actually travel to the Eternal City. For example, after the death of Leo X, in fall 1521, Cardinal Boeyens had to remain absent because of grave political unrest in Spain when, yet, the majority of the conclavists gave him the highest function in Christendom, albeit after many intrigues. Khlesl, disgraced in 1618 because he wanted to influence the imperial succession in the Holy Roman Empire, was in jail during the conclave of 1621.

Significantly however, many of the cardinal-prime ministers simple seem to have decided not to avail themselves of the opportunity to elect a new pope. Only Bakocz, Pole, Granvelle, Khlesl and Alberoni traveled to Rome one or more times. One of the obvious reasons must have been that for every cardinal who did not reside within reasonable distance from Rome, or, indeed, the Italian peninsula, the voyage not only was time-consuming but also dangerous. But the decisive factor surely was that these men had to remain at the helm of the ship that was their state. Also, however important the papal succession, whoever dared leave the center of his own power, i.e. his own capital and the court of his king, might find that his position had been taken when he returned. Did the eleven cardinal-prime ministers who, like their eminent colleagues, had a chance to be elected pope, seriously consider their candidacy and, even more relevant, were they seen as serious contenders?

Bakocz did his utmost, using both his vast fortune and the support of the king he served. But though he was in Rome for the conclave of 1513 and liberally scattered his gold, while, at the same time, convincing at least a few fellow-cardinals of his reforming ambitions, yet a Medici-prince was chosen. For geo-political reasons neither the Republic of Venice nor Emperor Maximilian wanted a Hungarian as pope-king, since he could have altered the balance of power not only on the Italian peninsula but also in the Adriatic and on the Balkans.

It is said that Wolsey tried to gain the papacy at least twice, during the conclaves of 1521/1522 and 1523, though he himself, obviously for the reasons I mentioned above, dare not leave England. Both times, Emperor Charles V ordered the Habsburg-minded cardinals not to vote for him: he did not want an Englishman on Peter's throne. Wolsey, of course, publicly voiced his relief that God had not called him to fulfill this highest but also heaviest of positions, but of course nobody was fooled. He really was very disappointed indeed, the more so since rumour had it that not even one cardinal had voted for him. On the other hand, his fellow-countryman Pole was a serious candidate no less than three times, in 1549 and twice in 1555. Yet he seems to have honestly tried to prevent his candidacy; indeed, in this he was successful, perhaps because the Italians did not want a foreigner, and the Emperor, as always, would not accept an Englishman.

Only one cardinal-prime minister actually made it to the papacy. In the conclave of 1521/1522, Grand Chancellor Gattinara let it be known that his imperial master Charles V insisted that his teacher and confidant Boeyens be given the tiara. It seems the man from Utrecht himself would happily have been passed over. Nevertheless, once elected, Adrian VI seriously started on a much-needed, grand-scale reform both of the Curia and of the Church at large. Being, also, a sober, almost monastic man, he was not loved in renaissance Rome. His sudden death, only twenty months after his arrival in the Eternal City, was

almost immediately attributed to poisoning, as always when popes die unexpectedly; there is no proof of this, of course.

However, though except for Boeyens no cardinal-prime minister ever has become pope, I would argue that it was not a real possibility, anyway. First of all, these men were far too important for the government of their own countries to ‘lose’ them to Rome, even if they themselves had wanted to go there. On the other hand, precisely their involvement in the (foreign) politics of their own states precluded their acceptance by the other powers on the European scene. Indeed, since the political proclivities of any cardinal were either well-known, or at least the subject of widespread speculation in governmental and diplomatic circles, the papal elections lasted as long as they often did. Last, but not least, there was the “veto” that, though not formalized, could be spoken by any of the Roman Catholic monarchs against any candidate during a conclave. The combination of all these elements goes a long way to explain why after the death of Adrian VI no cardinal attached to any of Europe’s great powers ever was chosen pope again. From 1523 till 1978 all popes came from the smaller Italian principalities, whose role in the European power play had become marginal, only.

---

## 8. Other Ambitions – Other Obligations?

---

Given the specificity of our contemporary perspective, we should realize that men of power par excellence as were the cardinal-prime ministers were expected to show that power openly, in every imaginable form of – sometimes near-royal – (re-)presentation. Precisely in doing so, they strengthened their position vis à vis their equals and the people at large. That, too, was part of their “life script”. Also, of course, the early modern’ sense of family dictated that whoever reached a position of wealth and power shared it with his relatives. Given that these men lived in two worlds, they could, nay even should act on two fronts.

Morton certainly wanted his power to be visible. In London, he inhabited the traditional residence of the archbishops of Canterbury, Lambeth Palace; he had a very impressive entrance building added to it. He also considerably enlarged the archiepiscopal summer palace, Knole. And he even constructed a new country house, at Hatfield. He seems to have cared less about religious representation: the only references are to a church and school at Oxford. Of course he was buried in his cathedral at Canterbury, where his effigy rests under a sculpted canopy. After his death, his many possessions fell to his nephews, and to the Canterbury see. He did however stipulate that for a period of thirty years thirty poor young men would be enabled to study either in Oxford or in Cambridge.

Cardinal Ximenez seems to have kept the vow of personal poverty that came with his position as a Franciscan monk. Nevertheless, he used his very ample

resources to contribute to the glory of Spain and, incidentally or not, let his own name live on. In Toledo, he ordered the construction of a new chapter house, modeled after the recently-completed Sistine Chapel in Rome. He also extended the medieval “studium” at Alcala de Henares into a full-fledged university, modern in the Humanist sense of the word. The library he gave to his foundation was stocked with titles representing the ‘new sciences’. In subsequent decades, many men who added luster to Spain’s “Siglo de Oro” studied there. He also had the old city church replaced by a new cathedral, in the modern, late-gothic style. There he wanted to be buried. His tomb was not, one should add, as sober as one might have expected from a monk.

Though Adrian ‘of Utrecht’ was a faithful servant of his imperial master, he yet hoped to once return to his native city. Starting in 1517, he had a little palace built there, that combined gothic and renaissance elements. However, since he had to follow the call of Rome, he never lived there. Once he was elected to the papacy, he yet did not follow his predecessors, who had given the Eternal City monuments that mostly glorified themselves. He did, however, instigate the institution of a college in the town where he himself had taught, Louvain. Later called ‘the papal college’, he paid for its construction.<sup>9</sup> One may well ask if he would have consented to that other “lieu de memoire”, the grand tomb erected by his friend Willem van Enckevoirt, whom he had made a cardinal, in the Roman church of Santa Maria dell’Anima.

In Hungary, Bakocz, as bishop of the very wealthy see of Eger/Raab and, subsequently, as archbishop of Esztergom/Gran acquired a huge fortune. He used it, amongst other things, to buy the castle and lordship of Varsövär, that, on his death, fell to his niece and her husband Peter Pallfy, the founder of the comital family of Erdödy. Bakocz does not seem to have spent his money on religious patronage, beyond the two chapels devoted to the Virgin he had built. However, the undoubtedly hugely expensive mausoleum he ordered to be added to the cathedral at Esztergom now ranks amongst the most beautiful examples of Italian-renaissance architecture in Hungary (Horler 1990).

In faraway Scotland, Beaton enjoyed the ample income his religious possessions generated. He lived in the archiepiscopal palace at St. Andrews, but also in a mansion-palace in Edinburgh, adjacent to the royal residence. Whether he had both embellished is unknown. Along the road that connected his see with the capital, he ordered the building of a fortified manor house, Monimail. Mostly, he took good care of his sons, each of whom he gave landed estates – probably taken from his ecclesiastical properties – and his daughters, who received considerable dowries. Yet it was not this conspicuous benevolence towards his next-of-kin that finally caused his downfall. In the end, he was

---

<sup>9</sup> The actual building dates from the 18th century.

murdered by Scottish Protestants, a group increasingly inimical of the ruling Roman Catholic elite. Beaton's body never has been found.

Not only did Granvelle not legalize his three children, nor did he leave them huge fortunes. Most of the wealth he had amassed went to a nephew, who was to continue the family name. During his life, the cardinal had established himself as a patron in the grand style. While in Besançon he was content to live in the beautiful mansion built by his father, in Brussels he constructed a magnificent new palace. His art collection was famous all over Europe (Gauthier 1902; De Jonge et al. 2000; Dinard 2009). However, his major interest was the new, Humanist sciences – the renowned Justus Lipsius acted as his secretary for some time. In that context, Granvelle subsidized the Antwerp printing house of Christoffel Plantijn, in order to enable scholars to share their knowledge with the world. We do not know whether he also ordered a grandiose tomb: the family chapel, adjacent to the parental residence, was destroyed during the French Revolution.

Wolsey decided upon the building of not one but two huge palaces, that all but equaled the residences of his royal master: York Place, in London, and Hampton Court. Inevitably, after he had been beheaded, Henry VIII appropriated both (Foyle 2002). The cardinal used the revenue from the sale of more than thirty monasteries which he dissolved – since, according to him, they did not function properly – to build a grammar school in his native town of Ipswich and to give his beloved Oxford an entirely new college. The Oxford foundation clearly was meant to outshine in splendour all existing ones, including the “King's College” which had been erected in Cambridge by Henry VI in 1441 and, seventy years later, had been given its by now world-famous, fan-vaulted chapel by Henry VII. But when Wolsey died, his “Cardinal College” was unfinished. Inevitably, Henry VIII took possession. In the end, the building that was destined to become the Oxford pendant of Henry's father's “King's College”, was dedicated to Christ: it continues as “Aedes Christi”, or, shortly, “Christ Church”. Nevertheless, and rightly so, Wolsey's portraits adorn the hall and the library – where his red hat is kept as well. However, he was not destined to occupy the splendid tomb he had had built by two Italian sculptors. That, too, was confiscated by the king. Although it remained unfinished, I assume it would have shown Wolsey kneeling, in his cardinal robes, as dictated by the fashion that, precisely in these years, came to Northern Europe from Rome.<sup>10</sup>

Richelieu, whose wealth was staggering, thought along equally grandiose lines (Bergin 1985). In Paris he built, close by the Royal Louvre, the so-called “Palais-Cardinal”. In its “Galerie des Hommes Illustres” his portrait flanked that of his master Louis XIII, the two of them surrounded by the famous men of their times. In the countryside of his birth, an entire new town was created, on

---

<sup>10</sup> Two centuries later, the sarcophagus of the tomb was used for Nelson's monument in St. Paul's Cathedral.

the symmetrical grid-iron plan dictated by renaissance urban ideals (Gady et al. 2009; Alsteens 2011). This “Richelieu” – raised to a duchy by the king and left by the cardinal to his nephew – still exists, barely visited by tourists. The enormous palace-chateau, almost finished at Richelieu’s death, was too much of an encumbrance for his heirs, though he had left them very well provided for. In the early 19th century it was demolished and sold, stone by stone. Last, but not least, Richelieu also wanted to contribute to the glory of France. To do so, he proposed – perhaps following Ximenes’s example – to reconstruct the buildings of the old Sorbonne university. Actually, one may well ask if he did not envisage the erection of a new chapel, only, that was to house his grand mausoleum.

Mazarin’s ambitions were, at least partly, comparable to the ones of his predecessor. As any powerful and wealthy man was supposed to do, and Richelieu had done as well, he first and foremost took care of his family, to start with the seven “mazarinettes”, the nickname of his nieces from the Mancini and Martinozzi families. Providing them with dowries from the gigantic fortune he had amassed – partly generated by the twenty-one abbeys he “possessed” –, he succeeded in luring young men from the highest French and Italian nobility into marrying them, though, in fact, in doing so they were contracting a “mesalliance”. In 1645, for political and family reasons he asked the pope to nominate his brother, the Dominican monk Michele Mazzarini, to the archiepiscopal see of Aix and, in 1647, to give him the red hat. His nephew by marriage, Francesco Mancini, became a cardinal as well.

But this family-loving cardinal-prime minister also founded a new institute of higher education, the “College des Quatre-Nations”, whose buildings now house the Académie Française. I feel Mazarin was particularly keen on the name he chose: the ‘four nations’ did, after all, refer to Flanders, Alsatia, Roussillon and Pignerol, territories conquered for France during his rule. Now, students hailing from these regions came to Paris: cultural politics that served the integration of new elites in the French state. In his will Mazarin left the college his enormous library of printed books and manuscripts, that had become a research center of Europe-wide renown (Michel 1999; de Conihout et al. 2006). As his predecessor, he stipulated he would be buried in the chapel of his foundation.

In the 18th century, Dubois and Fleury did act quite differently. Unlike their predecessors, and many other French Church dignitaries in the 16th and 17th centuries, they did not use their power to aggrandize their family on a large scale.

Admittedly, rumour had it that Dubois’s lifestyle was both expensive and wanton. But disregarding what certainly was a lot of malicious gossip, he simply seems to have been a very hard-working man. True, he did provide some of his siblings with lucrative positions in State and Church. His nephew became minister of works, and the son of his mistress was made cardinal-archbishop of

Lyon – where acted quite creditably –, and, later, even a government minister (Boutry 1902). Dubois's according to contemporary reports very beautiful mausoleum was destroyed during the French revolution. The only part that remains is the statue of Dubois himself by Cousteau that shows him kneeling, in his cardinal robes.<sup>11</sup>

Fleury spent the income from the benefices he had accumulated – amounting to not even 10% of the revenue Mazarin had enjoyed from comparable sources – on alms, and lived on his ministerial salary. On his death, a deeply saddened Louis XV ordered that his chief minister should be given a suitable monument. The design, by the famous sculptor Boucheron, significantly followed Richelieu's tomb, but, alas, was not executed.

Aberoni, too, does not seem to have significantly enriched his relatives. He himself did live a very luxurious life. After his banishment from Spain, he inhabited a palace in Rome, where he allowed visitors to come and view his expanding art collection that spilled over in his suburban villa of Sant'Agnese.<sup>12</sup> However, from 1732 onwards, he reconstructed an ancient monastery in his native city of Piacenza into a monumental and grand seminary for the education of priests (Poggi 1739). He also gave it his large library, and all of his collections, that included some very special Flemish tapestries, and, in his last will and testament, the tidy sum of 600.000 ducats, which indicates the extent of his fortune. In the church of the seminary, Alberoni also had his tomb erected, adorned with beautiful rococo-sculpture.<sup>13</sup>

The pattern that emerges from the above is not entirely consistent, though.

The only 'excess' the Humanist Pole seems to have allowed himself was the financial support he gave to authors whose theological works strengthened his own efforts to reform the Roman Catholic Church from within (Mayer 1996). He does not seem to have spent much on his family, and his own lifestyle was definitely sober, as is his monument in Canterbury Cathedral.

Melchior Khlesl, following the dictates of his calling, did not strive after wealth, either, nor, one must add, after everlasting visual glory. Amongst all fifteen cardinal-prime ministers his funeral monument is by far the most simple: looking for a sign of him in Vienna's St. Stephen's cathedral, one only finds a bust with a short inscription.

Gattinara, married but childless, yet did have an eye for the position of his relatives. He extended the Arborio estates in his native region. The emperor obligingly raised the little town of Gattinara to the rank of a marquisate, which remained in the family. The chancellor had a palace built there, adorned with frescoes, but one cannot really call it sumptuous. Interestingly, the man who

---

<sup>11</sup> It is now in the church of St. Roche, in Paris.

<sup>12</sup> The palace is on the Roman de Via del Tritone. The villa existed till the early 20th century, near the present Piazza Caprera.

<sup>13</sup> In 1996, the statues were robbed from the church.



only became a cardinal less than a year before his death, founded no less than two monasteries, one for the nuns of St. Clare, and the other for the regular canons of St. John Lateran. In the convent church of the latter, his tomb was erected – but it was destroyed by Italian revolutionaries in the late 18th century.

---

## 9. Concluding Remarks

---

Studying the phenomenon of the “life script” of the cardinal-prime ministers, it would have been fascinating to know whether at some time they have used the ‘manuals’ that could facilitate their path in the life they had chosen – texts that structured and implemented the “script” with pragmatic-ethical advice. How to conduct oneself at a princely court had been explained by Baldassarre Castiglione, in his since 1528 for at least two centuries influential *Il Cortegiano* (Burke 1996). But there were manuals for ‘the priest’, ‘the bishop’ and ‘the cardinal’ as well. And did these men, wanting to prepare themselves for a role in politics, also read another text, equally influential, viz. *Il Principe*, by Niccolò Machiavelli (1519)? Alas, without delving deep into the catalogues of the private libraries of these men – which often have not been preserved – this question cannot be answered. But is it possible to answer other questions? Obviously, it is impossible to formulate quantitatively valid conclusions on the basis of data that only concern fifteen persons. Yet, a more detailed study of the cardinal-prime ministers reveals at least the contours of the script, or scripts that determined their lives.

On the one hand, thirteen started their career serving the Church and five of them also became bishop, though they soon moved over to royal bureaucracy. On the other hand, only three or four actually received the red hat before they became prime minister. It thus seems that the cardinal dignity was deemed important to give extra weight and prestige to the political function – the more so since most of the cardinal-prime ministers did not use their right to assist in the election of a new pope. Maybe the awareness that at least he who represented a major European state stood no chance of being himself elected, explains this seeming paradox.

Generally, the fifteen men seem to have let the interests of the state they served prevail over those of the Church, certainly when the former threatened to collide with the latter. One might even argue that, in their combined function – as indicated above, the cardinalate often implied that they also held one or, even the most important see in their state – did at least temporarily realize a higher degree of integration between the realms of state and faith, which, of course, was precisely what most rulers wished.

Most though not all prime ministers spent prodigious amounts of money on their relatives. They also acted as large-scale patrons of the arts and sciences. In this sense, they did not differ conspicuously from their non-ecclesiastical

counterparts in Europe's early modern states. Regarding the visual arts, they mainly followed the new visions of the renaissance, which some of them even introduced to their trans-Alpine country (Sicca 2012).

Notwithstanding their cardinal dignity, they did not choose to establish specifically religious institutions, such as monasteries, perhaps because, as (arch)bishops), they also were involved in the perennial struggle between the regular and secular branches of the Church. Gattinara, the man who lived 'in the world' till in his last year he was named cardinal, and whose political course most explicitly stressed the authority of the State over that of the Church – and Alberoni are the exceptions to this rule. But seven out of the fifteen, or eight if one includes Granvelle's patronage of Plantin, did choose to royally support, or even found educational establishments. This seems to reflect the importance attached, in Humanist Europe, to the development of learning, precisely, I should add, by the state authorities of that time. Yet I suspect these choices were, at least psychologically, determined by their religious-cardinal "life script": after all, education traditionally had been a task performed by the church for the past thousand years.

Interestingly, given the time in which they lived – the 16th, 17th and 18th century – all fifteen reached a respectable, sometimes even unusual high age. In the 17th century, on average, a person's life expectancy at birth was 35 years. Those male children who survived the dangerous earliest years, might live on to reach, on average, the age of 50. The fifteen cardinal-prime ministers, however, averaged 73 at death, which exactly matches the average age reached during the 17th and 18th century by the archbishops of Canterbury – who I take as a "peer group".<sup>14</sup> To be more precise: seven cardinal-prime ministers died between 57 and 59 years of age, three between 64 and 69. Two became, respectively, 78 and 79 years old, one died in his early eighties, and Fleury even became 90.

Nevertheless, like everyone these men, too, had to face the fact that "media in vita mortui sumus". But whereas millions only were given a nameless grave, fourteen of the fifteen – Beaton's body having been disposed of in whereabouts unknown – did use their great wealth to leave a visually-impressive memento.

Eight – or nine if we count Boeyens, although we do not know whether he himself would have chosen the grand tomb he was given – decided to have magnificent monuments erected over their graves. Moreover, five of them were buried precisely in the central space of the educational or other foundations whose construction they themselves had ordered and financed. Thus, they secured a twofold way to preserve their memory. Even more significantly, all eight chose to be sculpturally represented on their tomb – as cardinal. Should

---

<sup>14</sup> <<http://early-moderneurope.blogspot.nl/2011/11/old-age.html>> (accessed December 20, 2013).

we conclude that, more than being prime minister, that had been the role of their life, in which they wanted to survive and be remembered?

---

## References

---

- Alsteens, S., et al. 2011. *Richelieu à Richelieu: architecture et décors d'un château disparu*. Cinisella: Silvana.
- Baumgartner, F. J. 2003. *Behind Locked Doors. A History of the Papal Conclaves*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Bergin, J. 1985. *Cardinal Richelieu: Power and the Pursuit of Wealth*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bertière, S. 2007. *Mazarin: le maître du jeu*. Paris: De Fallois.
- Blanchard, J.-V. 2011. *Eminence: Cardinal Richelieu and the rise of France*. New York: Walker & Co.
- Boone, R. 2011. Empire and medieval simulacrum: a political project of Mercurino di Gattinara. *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 42: 1027-49.
- Borante, C., ed. 1915. *Historia, vitae et gestorum per dominum magnum cancellarium*. Turin.
- Boutry, M. 1902. *Une créature du cardinal Dubois: Intrigues et missions du cardinal de Tencin*. Paris: Émile-Paul.
- Burke, P. 1996. *The Fortunes of the Courtier*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Castagnoli, P. 1929. *Il cardinale Giulio Alberoni*. Piacenza: Collegio Alberoni.
- Chaussinand-Nogaret, G. 2001. *Le Cardinal Dubois, 1665-1723, ou une certaine idée de l'Europe*. Paris: Perrin.
- Chaussinand-Nogaret, G. 2002. *Le Cardinal de Fleury: le Richelieu de Louis XV*. Paris: Payot & Rivages.
- Cools, H., C. Santing, and H. de Valk, eds. 2012. *Adrian VI: a Dutch pope in a Roman context*. Turnhout: Brepols.
- Croxton, D. 1999. *Peacemaking in early modern Europe: Cardinal Mazarin and the Congress of Westphalia*. London: Associated University Presses.
- D'Albis, C. 2012. *Richelieu, l'essor d'un nouvel équilibre européen*. Paris: A. Colin.
- De Conihout, I., and P. Michel, eds. 2006. *Mazarin: les lettres et les arts*. Paris: Éditions Monelle Hayot.
- De Jonge, K., G. Janssens, and M. van Durme, eds. 2000. *Les Granvelle et les anciens Pays-Bas*. Louvain: Leuven University Press.
- De Montherlant, H. 1960. *Le Cardinal d'Espagne*. Paris: H. Lefebvre.
- Dethan, G. 1981. *Mazarin: un homme de paix à l'âge baroque, 1602-1661*. Paris: Imprimerie nationale.
- Dinard, S.-P. 2009. La collection du cardinal Antoine de Granvelle. In *Les Cardinaux de la Renaissance et la modernité artistique*, ed. F. Lemerle, Y. Pauwels, and G. Toscano, 157-68. Villeneuve: IRHiS-Institut de Recherches Historiques du Septentrion.
- Duerloo, L. 2012. *Dynasty and Piety: Archduke Albert (1598-1621) and Habsburg political culture*. Farnham: Ashgate.

- Dulong, C. 1999. *Mazarin*. Paris: Perrin.
- Elliott, J., and L. Brockliss, eds. 1999. *The World of the Favourite*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Fenlon, D. 2008. *Heresy and Obedience in Tridentine Italy: Cardinal Pole and the Counter Reformation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Feros Carrasco, A. 2002. *Kingship and favoritism in the Spain of Philip III, 1598-1621*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Foyle, J. 2002. A reconstruction of Thomas Wolsey's Hampton Court. *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 45: 128-58.
- Gady, B., B. Gaehtgens, and J.-C. Boyer, eds. 2009. *Richelieu patron des arts*. Paris: Maison des sciences de l'homme.
- Garcia Oro, J. 2005. *Cisneros: un cardinal reformista en el trono de Espana (1436-1517)*. Madrid: La Esfera de los Libros.
- Gauthier, J. 1902. *Le cardinal de Granvelle et les artistes de son temps*. Besançon: Typ. de Dodivers.
- Goubert, G. 1998. *Mazarin*. Paris: Fayard.
- Fraknói, V. 1889. *Erdodi Bakócz Tamás élete*. Budapest: Athenaeum.
- Gwyn, P. 1990. *The King's Cardinal. The rise and fall of Thomas Wolsey*. London: Barrie and Jenkins.
- Harcourt-Smith, S. 1944. *Cardinal of Spain: the life and strange career of Alberoni*. New York: Knopf.
- Harper-Bill, C. 2004. Morton, John. *Dictionary of National Biography*. Oxford University Press.
- Hildesheimer, F. 2004. *Richelieu*. Paris: Flammarion.
- Hildesheimer, F. 2007. L'Europe, «grand dessein» de Richelieu? In *Macht und Moral: politisches Denken im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. M. Kremer and H.-R. Reuter, 238-49. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer.
- Holinshed, R. 1577. *Chronicles*. London.
- Horler, M. 1990. *Die Bakocz-Kapelle im Dom zu Esztergom*. Budapest: Helikon.
- Housely, N. 1998. Crusading as Social Revolt: The Hungarian Peasant Uprising of 1514. *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 49: 1-28.
- Jonnekin, G. 1989. *Le Cardinal de Granvelle: un destin européen au XVIe siècle*. Dole: Chazelle.
- Kerschbaumer, A. 1905. *Kardinal Klesl*. Vienna: W. Braumüller.
- Lagane, G. 2000. *L'Abbé Dubois: diplomate et premier ministre*. Paris: DEA.
- Kodek, I., ed. 2004. *Der Grosskanzler Kaiser Karls V. zieht Bilanz. Die Autobiographie Mercurino Gattinaras aus dem Lateinischen übersetzt*. Münster: Aschendorff.
- Levi, A. 2001. *Cardinal Richelieu and the making of France*. New York: Carroll & Graf.
- Malettke, K. 2000. Le concept de sécurité collective de Richelieu. In *L'Europe des Traités de Westphalie: esprit de la diplomatie et diplomatie de l'esprit*, ed. L. Bely, 55-66. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Marullo di Condojanni, C. et al., eds. 2001. *Carlo Ve Mercurino di Gattinara*. La Valletta.
- Mayer, T. 1996. When Maecenas Was Broke: Cardinal Pole's 'Spiritual' Patronage. *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 27: 419-35.

- Mayer, T. 2000. *Reginald Pole: prince and prophet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mercadier, J. 2002. *Le Cardinal de Fleury*. Paris: Beffroi.
- Merton, R. 1934. *Cardinal Ximenes and the making of Spain*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Triibner & Co.
- Michel, P. 1999. *Mazarin: prince des collectionneurs. Les collections et l'ameublement de cardinal Mazarin (1602-1661). Histoire et analyse*. Paris: RMN.
- Otto, R. 1917. *Das Heilige*. Breslau: Trewendt & Garnier
- Poggi, S. M. 1739. *Memorie istoriche della fondazione ed erezione del nuovo Collegio Ecclesiastico di S. Lazzaro*. Faenza.
- Ripert, P. 2002. *Richelieu, Mazarin: Le temps des cardinaux*. Toulouse: Éd. Privat.
- Sanderson, M. H. B. 1986. *Cardinal of Scotland: David Beaton, 1494-1546*. Edinburgh: J. Donald Publishers.
- Rainer, J. 1964. Kardinal Melchior Klesl (1552-1630). Vom 'Gegenreformer' zum 'Ausgleichpolitiker'. *Römische Quartalschrift* 59: 14-35.
- Rummel, E. 1999. *Jimenez de Cisneros: on the threshold of Spain's Golden Age*. Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.
- Sékely, G. 1980. Reform und Politik im Leben Kardinal Bakocz. In *Reform – Reformation – Revolution*, ed. S. Hoyer, 68-84. Leipzig: Karl-Marx-Universität.
- Shennan, J. 1966. The political role of the Parliament of Paris under Cardinal Fleury. *English Historical Review* LXXXI: 520-44.
- Sicca, S. M., and L. A. Waldman. 2012. *The Anglo-Florentine Renaissance. Art for the early Tudors*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Sturdy, D. J. 2004. *Richelieu and Mazarin: a study in statesmanship*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tomas y Valiente, F. 1963. *Los validos en la monarquia espanola del siglo XVII*. Madrid: Instituto de Estudios Políticos.
- Van Durme, M. 1953. *Antoon Perrenot bisschop van Atrecht, kardinaal van Granvelle, minister van Karel V en van Filips II (1517-1586)*. Brussels: Paleis der Academiën.
- Von Hammer-Purgstall, J. 1847-1851. *Khlesl's, des Cardinals-Directors des geheimen Cabinetes Kaiser Mathias, Leben*. Vienna: Gerold.
- Pastor, L. 1906. *Geschichte der Päpste seit dem Ausgang des Mittelalters*. Freiburg: Herder.
- Williams, P. 2006. *The Great Favourite. The duke of Lerma and the court and government of Philip III of Spain, 1598-1621*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.